A GLOBAL CONCERN

DISARMAMENT

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THE UNITED NATIONS AND DISARMAMENT

The founding of the United Nations at San Francisco on 26 June 1945 symbolized the beginning of a new era in international relations. The devastating effects of the Second World War united the founding States in their determination to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war".

The Charter establishes a legal and political framework for promoting international peace and security. The revolutionary changes brought about by the discovery of atomic energy and the devastating power of the atomic bomb—demonstrated shortly after the Charter was signed—gave an even greater sense of urgency to the need for disarmament. Faced with the risk of nuclear war, atomic weapons quickly became a focus of attention at the United Nations. The very first resolution of the General Assembly, adopted in January 1946, dealt with this question. It sought the elimination of atomic weapons and other weapons of mass destruction and the assurance that atomic energy would be used only for peaceful purposes.

UNITED NATIONS DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

The machinery for dealing with disarmament that was originally established by the Charter of the United Nations has gradually changed as international relations have evolved. The disarmament machinery under the authority of the United Nations now consists of the bodies described as follows:

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

The General Assembly is the main United Nations organ for the discussion of disarmament matters by all Member States. Its mandate is very broad; it may consider "the general principles of co-operation in the maintenance of international peace and security, including the principles governing disarmament and the regulation of armaments" (Article 11 of the Charter). It can make recommendations to Member States or to the Security Council or to both. While the Security Council also holds specific responsibilities in the field of disarmament under the Charter, it has mainly been the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs that have taken arms limitation and disarmament initiatives.

The number of disarmament-related resolutions adopted annually by the General Assembly has risen considerably over the years, from 3 at its first session in 1946 to more than 60 in recent years. This increase has paralleled a growing number of items on the Assembly's disarmament agenda. Currently, disarmament resolutions cover a broad spectrum of issues, including nuclear weapons, conventional weapons, chemical and biological weapons, confidence-building measures, nuclear-weapon-free zones, security guarantees to non-nuclear-weapon States, verification of arms limitation and disarmament agreements, and the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament.

General Assembly resolutions are not binding; they are recommendations that Member States cannot be compelled to implement. However, resolutions adopted by consensus express the agreed objectives, concerns and priorities of the international community. Even those adopted by majority votes carry important weight, as they reflect the views and opinions prevailing among most of the 159 States Members of the United Nations.

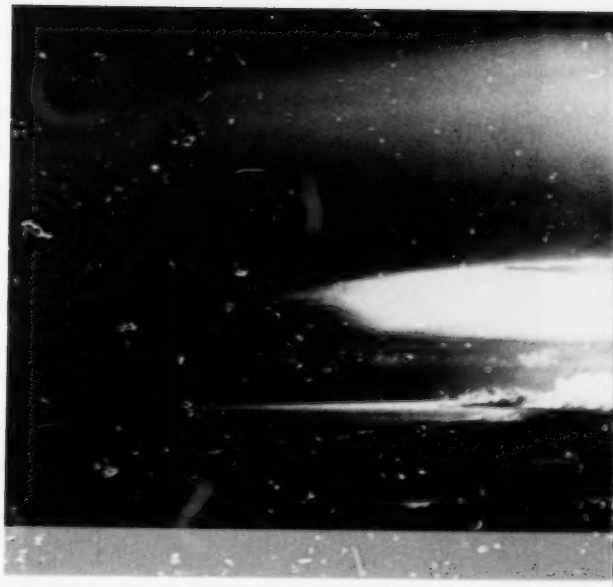
The General Assembly has on three occasions convened special sessions devoted solely to disarmament—in 1978, 1982 and 1988. The special sessions have focused international attention on the subject and have sought to identify generally acceptable ways of promoting international peace and security at significantly lower levels of armaments and armed forces.

FIRST COMMITTEE

The First Committee, one of the seven main Committees of the General Assembly, discusses and prepares drafts of disarmament-related resolutions before they are adopted by the Assembly. The Committee, like the General Assembly, consists of representatives of all Member States. It normally meets in October and November during the regular September-December sessions of the Assembly.

DISARMAMENT COMMISSION

The Disarmament Commission is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. Composed of representatives of all Member States, the Commission meets in New York for a substantive session of approximately four weeks, usually in May. The Commission provides an additional forum for in-depth discussion of specific disarmament issues, such as nuclear disarmament, conventional disarmament, the reduction of military budgets, naval armaments and disarmament, verification, the relationship between disarmament and development, and the review of the role of the United Nations in the field of disarmament.



CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

The multilateral disarmament negotiating forum for the international community is the Conference on Disarmament (CD). Its membership of 40 States includes all five nuclear-weapon States (China, France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom and the United States) and 35 other States. Located in Geneva, the CD has a unique relationship with the United Nations. It defines its own rules of procedure and develops its own agenda, taking into account the recommendations made by the General Assembly. The Conference has considered items such as a nuclear test ban, the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament, the prevention of an arms race in outer space, and chemical weapons. In recent years, it has made significant progress in drawing up a convention that would not only ban the use of chemical weapons but would also completely prohibit their development, production and stockpiling and provide for the elimination of existing stocks.

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OTHER DISARMAMENT MACHINERY

The Department for Disarmament Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, with offices in New York and Geneva, assists the Secretary-General in carrying out his functions in the field of arms limitation and disarmament. These include organizing and servicing meetings in New York and Geneva, monitoring and analysing relevant developments and trends, conducting studies and preparing reports, publishing information on disarmament, and holding conferences, seminars and symposia within the framework of the World Disarmament Campaign.

A number of *ad hoc* study groups of experts have been established to assist the Secretary-General in the preparation of in-depth studies on such subjects as nuclear weapons, disarmament and development, the economic and social consequences of the arms race, conventional weapons, the reduction of military budgets, and the multilateral aspects of verification.

The World Disarmament Campaign was established by the General Assembly in 1982 to inform, educate and generate public understanding and support for the objectives of the United Nations in the field of arms limitation and disarmament. The Campaign is directed at the general public throughout the world, but focuses in particular on five major constituencies: non-governmental organizations, the media, educational institutions, research institutes and elected representatives.

The General Assembly has also established three centres which deal on a regional level with issues of peace and disarmament and which co-ordinate regional activities under the World Disarmament Campaign. The centres are located in Lomé (Togo), Kathmandu (Nepal), and Lima (Peru) and cover Africa, Asia and the Latin American and Caribbean region, respectively.

The United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR), in Geneva, is an autonomous body within the framework of the United Nations, established in 1980 to carry out independent research on disarmament and related international security issues.

The Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters offers independent advice to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on matters of arms limitation and disarmament. Its functions also include serving as Board of Trustees of UNIDIR. The Advisory Board is currently composed of 24 eminent persons.

MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS

Since the establishment of the United Nations, the combined efforts of Governments have led to a number of important agreements, treaties and conventions committing their parties to various arms limitation and disarmament measures, both bilateral—agreements negotiated between and applicable to only two States—and multilateral—agreements negotiated among and applicable to more than two States. The agreements may be either global or regional in scope. Fact Sheet No. 58, issued by the UN Department for Disarmament Affairs, provides a short description of the following Treaties.

GLOBAL MULTILATERAL TREATIES

- The 1963 *Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere, in Outer Space and under Water.*
- The 1967 *Treaty on the Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space, including the Moon and other Celestial Bodies.*
- The 1971 *Treaty on the Prohibition of the Emplacement of Nuclear Weapons and Other Weapons of Mass Destruction on the Sea-Bed and the Ocean Floor and in the Subsoil Thereof.*
- The 1972 *Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production and Stockpiling of Bacteriological (Biological) and Toxin Weapons and on Their Destruction.*
- The 1977 *Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques.*
- The 1979 *Agreement Governing the Activities of States on the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies.*
- The 1981 *Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects.*

REGIONAL MULTILATERAL TREATIES

- The 1959 *Antarctic Treaty.*
- The 1967 *Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America.*
- The 1985 *South Pacific Nuclear Free Zone Treaty.*

BILATERAL TREATIES

- The 1972 *Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems.*
- The 1972 United States-Soviet *Interim Agreement on Certain Measures with respect to the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.*
- The 1974 United States-Soviet *Treaty on the Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests.*
- The 1976 United States-Soviet *Treaty on Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes.*
- The 1979 United States-Soviet *Treaty on the Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms* (SALT II).
- The 1987 *Treaty between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Elimination of Their Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles.*

In addition, the United States and the Soviet Union concluded, in 1963, the so-called "hot-line" agreement (supplemented and modified in 1971 and again upgraded in 1984); the 1971 *Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War;* the 1973 *Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War;* the 1987 *Agreement on the Establishment of Nuclear Risk Reduction Centers;* and the 1988 *Agreement on Notifications of Launches of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles and Submarine-launched Ballistic Missiles.* Agreements to avoid nuclear accidents have also been concluded between the Soviet Union and France, in 1976, and between the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, in 1977.

DISARMAMENT: A CONTINUING CONCERN

Important as they are, the disarmament agreements concluded since the founding of the United Nations have not lessened the need for further measures. World military expenditure has risen to an estimated level of more than $US 900 billion a year. Armaments have accumulated and become more sophisticated, thereby absorbing scarce resources, to the detriment of economic and social development in many countries. Some 150 wars, fought with non-nuclear weapons, have taken place since the end of the Second World War, leaving a death toll of around 20 million persons, most of them civilians.

Above all, more than 50,000 nuclear weapons remain deployed world-wide, enough to destroy the world many times over. Although nuclear weapons have not been used since 1945, the threat of a nuclear confrontation—whether initiated wilfully or by accident—remains a central concern of the international community.

In recent years, an international climate more propitious to progress in the field of arms limitation and disarmament has developed. In 1985, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought". The successful conclusion of the INF negotiations in 1987 was a milestone in the quest for nuclear disarmament. It is the first agreement ever for the actual dismantling of nuclear weapons, providing for the elimination of all Soviet and United States intermediate-range (1,000-5,500 km) and shorter-range (500-1,000 km) missiles and their launchers and support equipment. The current United States-Soviet negotiations on a 50 per cent reduction in their strategic offensive arms holds the promise of the most drastic cut in nuclear weapons since the beginning of the nuclear age.

In the non-nuclear sphere, important confidence- and security-building measures designed to reduce the risk of military confrontation in Europe were agreed on in 1986. New talks on conventional armaments and armed forces in Europe began in Vienna early in 1989. In January 1989, more than 140 States participating in a conference in Paris on chemical weapons condemned the use of such weapons and called for an accelerated effort by the Conference on Disarmament to conclude a convention completely banning them.

Issues of arms limitation and disarmament will remain high on the agenda of the international community. The problems related to the armaments build-up and the use of arms in conflicts are not likely to be resolved easily. Disarmament treaties are, almost without exception, the result of long and painstaking negotiations, a process of give-and-take between parties that keep a close eye on their national security interests.

In general, the role of the United Nations system in the field of disarmament is twofold. First, the Conference on Disarmament offers a forum for the actual negotiation of multilateral arms limitation and disarmament agreements. Secondly, the other disarmament bodies of the United Nations enable countries to explain their positions before the international community, to acquaint themselves with the positions of others, and to identify common ground between them. In this capacity, the United Nations functions as a forum for the exchange of views and ideas and as a barometer of international consensus on issues of arms limitation and disarmament.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For additional information on disarmament, publications available free of charge are: *Disarmament Facts*, the *Newsletter of the World Disarmament Campaign* and a number of *ad hoc* publications. They may be requested from:

World Disarmament Campaign
United Nations, Department for Disarmament Affairs, Room S-3100, New York, N.Y. 10017, USA

Geneva Branch, DDA, United Nations
Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa
B.P. 2705, Lome, Togo

United Nations Regional Centre for Peace, Disarmament and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean
Mcal. Blas Cerdeña 450, San Isidro, Lima, Perú

United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Asia
P.O. Box 107, Pulchowk, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Sales publications of the Department for Disarmament Affairs include the *Disarmament Yearbook*, *Disarmament: A Periodic Review by the United Nations* and *The United Nations General Assembly and Disarmament*. Please order from United Nations Sales Section, New York, N.Y. 10017, United States of America, or Palais des Nations, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.

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